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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001830

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#) [CF](#)

SUBJECT: MORE THAN 300 FORMER ZAIRIAN SOLDIERS RETURN TO DRC

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (U) On November 1-2, 318 former soldiers of the Mobutu-era Armed Forces of Zaire (FAZ) returned to the DRC from Brazzaville after fleeing the country following the fall of the Mobutu regime in 1997. The soldiers and their families (totaling 764 persons) are undergoing a sensitization and orientation program outside Kinshasa run by CONADER (DRC's national disarmament agency) for a one-week period. The soldiers will then have the choice of either being demobilized into Congolese society, or reintegrated into the national army.

2. (SBU) According to Daniel Kawata, CONADER's General Coordinator, his agency will continue receiving ex-FAZ soldiers until the end of November. Kawata told PolOff November 2 that he expects another 400-500 ex-FAZ to return to Kinshasa during that time. According to officials from the International Organization of Migration, approximately 3,000 ex-FAZ soldiers and their families are living in the ROC, mostly in the cities of Ifondo and Pointe Noire. The refugees recently repatriated had been living in Brazzaville.

3. (SBU) Kawata said CONADER will begin the process of identifying the former soldiers November 3, at a location called "Jolie Site," about 30 minutes south of Kinshasa. While there, the soldiers and their families will undergo orientation programs where they will be taught about the structure and goals of the new Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and the plan for democratization and elections in the DRC. They will also be provided information on options for pursuing a civilian life, including activities in agriculture or commerce.

4. (C) After the one-week orientation program, the former soldiers must then choose whether or not they wish to join the FARDC. If they do not want to join the military, they and their family members will be sent to rural communities for repatriation. Those who choose to enter the FARDC will be relocated to brassage centers throughout the country. Kawata said he expects approximately two-thirds of the returning soldiers will choose to be integrated into the FARDC. Kawata added that the repatriation of the ex-FAZ is an important step for DDR efforts and CONADER, as it will help all Congolese understand that each person is a stakeholder in the peace process, and all elements of Congolese society must take part in it.

5. (SBU) Since October 18, the repatriated soldiers and their families had been living in squalid conditions near Brazzaville's port, in the hopes of crossing over to Kinshasa. GDRC authorities in Kinshasa at first prevented the group from crossing, ultimately suspending river traffic between the two cities. The GDRC was initially concerned the ex-FAZ soldiers posed a security threat, as many had apparently committed acts of looting and other violence before they fled the country. After CONADER and other GDRC delegations visited the refugees, however, officials concluded the group would be allowed into the GDRC under the auspices of CONADER.

6. (C) Comment: The return of the ex-FAZ closes what has been a tense chapter in Kinshasa regarding the peace process and the integration of the national army. Elements of the ex-FAZ had been viewed by a few GDRC officials as suspected agents in a coup against the current government, largely due to their ties to the old Mobutu regime. In addition, CONADER's work at demobilizing former combatants and building up the FARDC has been largely ineffective. However, a successful DDR process with regard to the ex-FAZ is a positive step towards achieving a unified army and in moving the DRC towards a more durable peace. End Comment.

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